



# Focus

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## Financial Assistance for Drought Relief

### Overview

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In 1989 the State Legislature gave the Department of Ecology (Ecology) permanent authority to declare drought conditions in areas where:

- the water supply is below 75 percent of normal or projected to fall below this level, and
- the shortage is likely to create undue hardships.

Based on the March 1, 2001 water supply projections, drought was formally declared in Washington state on March 14, 2001.

The legislation also authorized Ecology to provide financial assistance in response to a statewide-declared drought. The state's Drought Preparedness Account has \$5.1 million to help lessen the effects of this year's drought.

Ecology adopted an emergency rule (*Chapter 173-167 WAC, Drought Preparedness Funding for Agricultural, Municipal and Utility, and Fish and Wildlife Needs, and for Purchasing and Leasing Water for Fish*) to provide basic guidelines which will efficiently and fairly fund activities to help our state get through what is anticipated to be a dry summer.

### Use of emergency funds

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The Department of Ecology intends to provide the \$5.1 million from the Drought Preparedness Account to buy and lease water rights, to provide grants and loans to help conserve and deliver water for agriculture, and to issue grants and loans to public water utilities.

Public bodies, such as public utilities, cities, counties, irrigation districts and Indian tribes may apply for drought financial assistance. The money is for projects and activities that would alleviate drought conditions that may harm people's health and safety. Funding could go toward three primary categories:

- Drinking water supplies – repairing facilities and other measures to ensure people get drinking water.
- Agricultural activities -- improving irrigation delivery systems, and providing money to Local Improvement Districts for conservation projects.
- Fish survival – helping fish stocks identified as threatened or endangered.

### Financial assistance qualification criteria

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Ecology will use the following criteria to determine whether an organization qualifies for funding:

- The public body must use the funding only for previously established activities within an area where a drought emergency has been declared; and
- The public body must be (or anticipate) receiving less than 75 percent of its normal water supply due to the drought and must be (or anticipate) experiencing "undue hardship" as a result.

Ecology will process all grant and loan applications as quickly as possible, including forgoing requirements for public notification and State Environmental Policy Act review.

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### **Decisions about which projects get the money**

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Ecology will make grant and loan decisions for agricultural activities, public drinking water and fish survival projects based upon the following criteria:

- The proposed project must assist in alleviating a water shortage.
- The organization must provide proof it can repay the loan and that the project will be successful.
- Water derived from the project must be put to a beneficial use as a substitute for water that is not available because of the drought.
- Water gained from the project cannot be used to irrigate additional land.
- The proposed project cannot harm existing water users.

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### **How the money will be distributed**

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Ecology will provide funding assistance to agricultural, municipal, public utility, and fish-related projects with the following guidelines:

- No one organization will receive more than 10 percent (\$510,000) of the total available drought relief funds. However, if the State Legislature provides Ecology with additional drought funds, Ecology will modify this restriction.
- An organization may receive up to 100 percent of a combination of a loan and a grant to pay for the total drought project costs.
- A grant may be issued for up to 20 percent of the entire cost of a drought project.
- If the organization is in an area that is forecasted to receive 50 percent or less of their normal seasonal water supplies, they may get a grant for up to 40 percent of the total project costs.

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### **Buying or leasing water for fish**

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Ecology may buy or lease water rights from willing sellers to keep water in streams to help fish survive the drought. It will be a priority to make purchases and leases of water rights in areas where fish are listed as threatened or endangered. Ecology's criteria to make buying and leasing decisions will include selecting more senior water rights, the greatest benefit for restoring and protecting fish, water quality improvement, and reasonable price.

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### **How to apply**

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Applications for funding assistance are available from Ecology (see below) and should be submitted to the agency when completed. Ecology and other agencies affected by the proposed project will expedite a decision on the request. Please note that all required permits and approvals for proposed projects must be obtained before a loan or grant agreement is signed.

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### **For more information**

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The emergency rule (Chapter 173-167 WAC) and other drought information is available on Ecology's Internet web pages. Go to [www.ecy.wa.gov](http://www.ecy.wa.gov) and click on Drought. For further financial assistance information and **applications** for funding assistance please contact:

Department of Ecology, P.O. Box 47600, Olympia, WA 98504

**Fish survival projects:** Peggy Clifford, (360) 407-7262 or email [[pcli461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:pcli461@ecy.wa.gov)].

**Agricultural and public utility projects:** Ray Newkirk, (360) 407-6630

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